

This is a printer friendly version of an article from the **The Olympian**

To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

---

# **Fear of flooding prompts Nisqually evacuation alert**

**BY JENNIFER LATSON AND JOHN DODGE**

THE OLYMPIAN

Residents living along the lower Nisqually River were urged to leave their homes late Wednesday afternoon, as the swollen river continued to rise.

▫ The evacuation advisory came after Tacoma Power ramped up the release of water from its Alder Dam reservoir into the river, where flooding along the county's eastern border already had made one home an island and had other residents wedging sandbags between their homes and the riverbanks.

Residents who got the call to leave their homes about 4:30 p.m. were those living in the lowlands along the river's edge east of the Durgin Road Tunnel and Sixth Avenue in the northeast part of the county south of Interstate 5. They were asked to stay away at least overnight, although the evacuations were not mandatory.

Officials said they were worried the flooding would worsen during the night and then they'd have to evacuate neighborhoods of sleeping people.

"We don't want to be knocking on people's doors in the middle of the night," said Don Krupp, the county's chief administrator.

The Red Cross Mount Rainier Chapter opened a shelter at the Mormon church in Lacey for families affected by flooding.

As darkness fell, volunteers and apartment residents were placing several thousand sandbags on a river levee in front of the Riverside Manor apartment complex in hopes of holding back the water.

"We don't have any reports of water in homes yet, but if the Nisqually River flows remain high over the next several days, we could see some localized flooding," Thurston County spokesman John Tennis said Wednesday afternoon.

In Bucoda, county road workers were worried that a hillside road would be lost in the heavy rains.

Tono Road, which leads from Bucoda to Centralia's coal mine and power plant, had cracked and started to slide over the hill's edge. "It went from maybe an inch and a half to 6 inches of pavement" dropping off the side, county road manager Brent Payton said.

Road workers planned to patch the road temporarily this morning and plan a permanent fix. The road remains open. It's built atop mine shafts that settle periodically, especially when the ground is saturated as it is this week.

One of the roads closest to the Nisqually River, Sixth Avenue, closed Wednesday because of flooding.

Tacoma Power released 13,000 cubic feet of water per second from the shallow 45-acre reservoir Wednesday and expected to hold at that number through the night, utility spokeswoman June Summerville said. That compares with a typical winter release downstream of 2,500 cfs.

Minor flooding of pastures and low-lying roads happens when the flow rate exceeds about 8,000 cubic feet per second, according to county officials. Moderate flooding occurs when the rate exceeds 15,000 cubic feet.

As of 4:30 p.m., river flows at McKenna had reached 15,800 cubic feet, enough water to cause flooding in such areas as Hayko Lane, Sixth Avenue, Riverbend Campground and Riverside Manor Apartments next to the Old Highway 99 river bridge. Flows of 16,500 cfs can cause more widespread flooding.

The Deschutes and Skookumchuck rivers were receding Wednesday afternoon after cresting Tuesday. The Chehalis River continued to rise, and flooding along its banks closed roads in South Thurston County, including the road to Lucky Eagle Casino and roads in several Independence Valley neighborhoods.

The Chehalis was expected to crest Wednesday night.

Flooding concerns along the lower Nisqually were worse Wednesday than at any time last year, Thurston County Emergency Management head Kathy Estes said. It was still much less severe than flooding in February 1996, which damaged or destroyed 343 homes countywide, including many along the Nisqually River.

In that record-setting flood, Nisqually River flows soared to 45,000 cubic feet per second.

Many downstream residents charged Tacoma Power with negligence for releasing so much water from the Alder Lake reservoir so quickly 10 years ago. The utility should have drained the reservoir sooner to prepare for the rainstorms and melting snow, they said.

It's not that simple, the utility responded. The utility is required to maintain an adequate supply of water in the reservoir to provide water for salmon in the summer.

Some downstream residents remain bitter about the lack of notification they received about the reservoir water releases.

"They shouldn't wait so long and then release it all at once," said Rose Brock, whose Sixth Avenue home near the river was threatened by flooding Wednesday.

Thurston County now has a telephone warning system it activates when river flooding is imminent on any of the four flood-prone rivers in the county — the Nisqually, Deschutes, Skookumchuck and Chehalis.

More than 450 residents have enrolled in the voluntary phone alert system, Tennis said.

Nisqually tribal member Georgianna Kautz said both the salmon resources and the homes of tribal members are affected by how the river flows are managed at the Alder Dam reservoir built in 1912.

"We're working with Tacoma Power to have them spill a little bit at a time," said Kautz, whose Durgin Road home was flooded by Nisqually River water in 1996.

About 12,000 cfs of water was entering the reservoir Wednesday, compared with 16,000 cfs Monday. That means the utility is gaining back a little bit of the storage capacity it lost in recent, rain-soaked days.

## **Repairs continue at water-damaged sites**

Rain continued to wreak havoc on South Sound, and city, county and state crews will be on the lookout for more problems today. Updates on some of the problems caused by the rain.

- State crews worked Wednesday to stabilize the hillside trail area leading from the Capitol Campus to Heritage Park, replacing patches of rain-saturated soil with rock, and clearing debris off the trail.

Three surface landslides on the hillside forced closure of the trail Tuesday until further notice.

- General Administration, which manages Capitol Lake, will watch for signs of flooding today.

- Repair of the 14th Avenue sewer line between Cooper Point Road and the Goldcrest subdivision is expected to continue through Sunday, closing the road to through traffic during construction. The aging sewer line collapsed Tuesday because of saturated soil.

- The Garfield Nature Trail in Olympia remains closed after a mudslide wiped out part of the trail and a footbridge. The trail will be closed until drier weather allows the hillside to stabilize.

- The southern portion of Park of the Seven Oars at the top of the Fourth Avenue bridge corridor remains cordoned off with yellow tape. A landscaped area was damaged by a mudslide.
- About 3,500 customers of Mason County Public Utilities District 3 were without power after a tree fell over transmission lines near Gladwin Beach on North Shore Road on the Tahuya Peninsula about 11:30 p.m. Tuesday. The tree caused extensive damage. Electricity was restored about 12:15 p.m. Wednesday.

## **Rain a sure thing; slides a possibility**

The National Weather Service forecast predicts rain today through Saturday, with a possible break Sunday before more rain falls Sunday night through Monday. There's also a good chance of rain Tuesday through Wednesday of next week, although forecasters say it's difficult to make accurate predictions beyond three days.

The chance for flooding and slides is high today.

Emergency management officials are urging people who live in or travel through flood-prone areas not to take chances. Several minor landslides have occurred around South Sound and more are possible. The Department of Transportation is monitoring more than 2,700 potential slide locations around the state.

The Olympian

## **Transportation affected**

### **ROAD CLOSURES**

Numerous roads were closed Wednesday because of flooding.

### **Thurston County**

Tumwater Valley Drive (Valley Athletic Club also closed Wednesday because of the flooding)

Anderson Road Southwest, on the gravel portion north of U.S. Highway 12

Independence Road Southwest from James Road Southwest to Michigan Hill Road Southwest

Independence Road Southwest from about 200 yards north of 201st Avenue to Backman Road

188th Avenue Southwest at Lucky Eagle Casino

Moon Road Southwest from Highway 12 to 188th

110th Avenue Southwest from Delphi Road to Creekwood Drive

## **Mason County**

U.S. Highway 101 at the Skokomish River could have water over the highway today.

State Route 131 is closed in both directions 1.7 miles south of U.S. Highway 12 because of high water. Traffic is being detoured to Forest Service Road 23.

## **Pierce County**

State Route 161 was reduced to single-lane alternating traffic because of water over the highway south of Kapowsin Highway. There was no estimate for its reopening.

## **Grays Harbor County**

U.S. Highway 101 near the Pacific County Line is showing slow settlement across both lanes. Crews are patching the road, and a 10 mph speed limit is in place.

State Route 107 is closed indefinitely 3 miles south of Montesano. It closed Dec. 29 because of severe road damage. Sections of the highway surface have cracked and buckled, and the roadway slid horizontally as much as 25 feet. Crews hope to reopen the route by the end of the week.

## **Kitsap County**

State Route 166 near Port Orchard was closed by a mudslide Saturday, and a 2.5-mile section of the road remains closed because of an unstable slope. Motorists can detour through Port Orchard Boulevard to Tremont to connect with Route 16.

## **AMTRAK**

Amtrak Cascades Service was suspended between Portland and Vancouver, British Columbia, because of mudslides. For more information, call 800-872-7245, or go to [www.AmtrakCascades.com](http://www.AmtrakCascades.com).

---



